# XVII
# THREE BASKETS (*TIPITAKA*) IN BUDDHISM

**CONTENTS**

# 1. What is the *Tipitaka*?

The word of the Buddha, which is originally called the *Dhamma*, consists of three aspects, namely: Doctrine (*Pariyatti*), Practice (*Patipatti*) and Realization (*Pativedha*). The Doctrine is preserved in the Scriptures called the *Tipitaka*. English translators of the *Tipitaka* have estimated it to be eleven times the size of the Christian Bible. It contains the Teachings of the Buddha expounded from the time of His Enlightenment to *Parinibbana* over forty-five years.

*Tipitaka* in Pali means **Three Baskets** (*Ti* = Three, *Pitaka* = Basket), not in the sense of function of storing but of **handing down**, just like workers carry earth with the aid of baskets handed on from worker to worker, posted in a long line from point of removal to point of deposit, so the Baskets of Teachings are handed down over the centuries from teacher to pupil.

The Three Baskets are: Basket of **Discipline** (*Vinaya Pitaka*), which deals mainly with the rules and regulations of the Order of monks and nuns; Basket of **Discourses** (*Sutta Pitaka*) which contains the discourses delivered by the Buddha to individuals or assemblies of different ranks in the course of his ministry; Basket of **Ultimate Things** (*Abhidhamma Pitaka*) which consists of the four ultimate things: Mind (*Citta*), Mental-factors (*Cetasikas*), Matter (*Rupa*) and *Nibbana*. The contents of the Pali *Tipitaka* are shown in the Appendix.

According to **Ven. Sayadaw U Thittila**[1], the versions of the Pali Canon existing in Theravada countries such as Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos differ very slightly, with only a few minor grammatical forms and spelling. In substance and meaning and even the phrases used, they are in complete agreement. The Pali *Tipitaka* contains everything necessary to show forth the Path to the ultimate goal of *Nibbana*, the cessation of all suffering.

**a) Each Tradition has its own Version of the *Tipitaka***

There are three versions of the *Tipitaka* adopted by the three branches of Buddhism in existence today, namely: (i) the **Pali *Tipitaka*** of the **Theravada** tradition, (ii) the vast **Mahayana *Tripitaka*** in Chinese consisting primarily of translations of Sanskrit Texts and (iii) the **Tibetan *Tripitaka*** in the Tibetan language, called the ***Kagyur*** (consisting of translations of Sanskrit Texts & the Four Great *Tantras*) and ***Tangyur*** (consisting of works of Indian and Tibetan scholars). Theravada, the orthodox Buddhist school which traces its origin to the Buddha's time, rejects the Mahayana and Tibetan scriptures as later creations that do not reflect the Buddha's Teachings.

According to **Warder**[2], although Mahayana claims to have been founded by the Buddha himself, the consensus of the evidence is that Mahayana teachings originated in South India somewhere in Andhra Pradesh during the 1st century AD. Several of its leading teachers were born in South India, studied there and afterwards went to the North to teach, one of whom was **Nagarjuna**. The idea that the sutras had been confined to the South was a convenient way for Mahayanists to explain to Buddhists in the North why it was that they had not heard these texts directly from their own teachers, without admitting that they were **recent fabrications**.

Another alternative explanation recorded by the Tibetan historian **Taranatha** was that though the Buddha had taught the Mahayana sutras, they were not in circulation in the world of men for many centuries, there being no competent teachers and no intelligent students. The sutras were transmitted secretly to various supernatural beings and preserved by the gods and *nagas* (dragons). These secret teachings were brought out from their hiding places when Mahayana teachers who were capable of interpreting these sacred texts appeared around the 2nd century AD. This is as good as admitting that no Mahayana texts existed until the 2nd century AD!

As pointed out by **Warder**[2], such fanciful accounts cannot be accepted as historical facts. Since everything about early Buddhism suggests that the Buddha's Teaching was never meant to be secret,

the possibility of a secret transmission amounts to an **aspersion** on the powers of the Buddha that he failed to do what others were able to accomplish 600 years later. Also, in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha had declared that there was nothing with regard to the teaching that he held to the last with the closed fist of the teacher who keeps some things back.

The claim by Mahayana that there were no competent teachers and intelligent students during Buddha's time is aimed at **exalting their own status** and **disparaging** the accomplishments of the Chief Disciples and *Arahants*. In fact, one of the earliest Mahayana *sutras*, the ***Ratnakuta* Sutra** denounces the pupils (*Savakas* or *Arahants*) as not really 'sons' of the Buddha i.e. not really Buddhists! Practically every Mahayana *sutra* repeats this denunciation of the 'inferior (*hina*)' way of the pupil rather unpleasantly in sharp contrast to the **tolerance and understanding** characteristic of most of the earlier Buddhist texts that display the **true spirit** of the *Dhamma* taught by the Buddha.

### b) Reliability of *Tipitaka* compared with other Religious Records

In 'The Life of the Buddha' by Ven. Bhikkhu **Nanamoli**[3], the Pali scholar, T.W. Rhys Davids, made the relevant observation that:

"The Buddha did not leave behind a number of deep simple sayings, from which his disciples subsequently expanded on to build up a system or systems of their own, but had himself thoroughly elaborated his doctrine and during his long career (45 years of ministry), he had ample time to repeat the principles and details of the system over and over again to his disciples, to test their knowledge of it until finally his leading disciples were accustomed to the subtlest metaphysical distinctions and trained in the wonderful command of memory which Indian ascetics then possessed. When these facts are recalled to mind, it will be seen that much more reliance may be placed upon the doctrinal parts of the Buddhist Scriptures than the corresponding late records of other religions."

## 2. Language of Buddha's Words (*Buddhavacana*)

In *Cullavagga* V, 33 of the **Book of Discipline**[4], the Buddha made an injunction allowing monks to learn his Teachings in '*saka nirutti*' or 'own dialect', which the great Pali commentator **Ven. Buddhaghosa** had interpreted to mean the **Magadhi** dialect spoken by the Buddha, and forbidding them to put the teachings into Sanskrit verses. It appears that two brothers, both *bhikkhus* named Yamelu and Tekula, once approached the Buddha complaining that monks of different castes and clans were corrupting the Buddha's words by preaching them in their own dialects. They wanted to put his words into Sanskrit verses (*chandaso*), but the Buddha forbade them with this injunction. For the last two thousand four hundred years, the term '*saka nirutti*' had signified the Magadhi language.

During the later part of the 19th century, Western scholars began to show an interest in Buddhism and when the Pali scholars **Rhys Davids** and **Oldenberg** began translating the ***Vinaya* Texts**[5] into English, they translated the Buddha's injunction as "I allow you, O *Bhikkhus*, to learn the words of the Buddha each in his own dialect", to mean **each monk's own dialect**. Most scholars have tended to accept this interpretation, except **Geiger**, who concurred with Ven. Buddhaghosa that it meant the Buddha's own language. Rhys Davids, on second thought, appears to have been convinced of the interpretation of Ven. Buddhaghosa. Consequently in his later works, he accepted '*saka nirutti*' as the Buddha's own language but with an ingenious modification. In his Foreword to the Pali-English Dictionary by T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede first published in London 1921-1925, he argues that the Pali of the canonical books is based on vernacular **Kosalan**, the Buddha's native dialect.

Recently, **Law**[6], in his book entitled 'A History of Pali Literature' is of the opinion that Buddhaghosa had taken the term '*chandasa*' indiscriminately as a synonym for the Sanskrit language and the term '*saka nirutti*' as a synonym for the Magadhi dialect used as a medium of instruction (*vacanamagga*) by the Buddha. According to Law, the Sanskrit language was divided into Vedic and current usage and the Buddha's injunction directed against Vedic only and not

current Sanskrit. "*It is beyond our comprehension how Buddhaghosa went so far as to suggest that by the term saka nirutti, the Buddha meant his own medium of instruction and nothing but the Magadhi dialect. It would be irrational, erroneous and dogmatic of the Buddha to promulgate this rule that Magadhi is the only correct form of speech to learn his teaching and that every other dialect would be the incorrect form*", wrote Law.

**a) Medium of Instruction for Monks**

Despite his strong sentiment, Law's argument does not appear to have taken into consideration the prevailing conditions with regard to the system of learning in ancient times. Back then, it was the custom for pupils who wish to study under a certain master to live with the master and learn the doctrine by oral tradition in the latter's language. **Venerable Buddhaghosa's** interpretation is certainly in consonance with the Indian spirit that there can be no other form of the Buddha's words than in which the Master himself had preached. In an oral tradition it is imperative for the pupils to be able to learn, recite and remember the teachings in a **common language**, for in this way any mistake or distortion can be quickly detected and corrected by rehearsing together in that language. This was what actually took place in the **Buddhist Councils** after the Buddha's *Parinibbana* to ensure that the true teachings were preserved. Just imagine the chaos if various dialects were employed to rehearse the Master's teachings in the Buddhist Councils. When these factors are considered, it certainly appears logical why the Buddha made this injunction allowing the monks to learn his teachings in the **common dialect** of his time, **Magadhi**, although his native dialect was **Kosalan**, the Sakyan kingdom being a vassal state of Kosala.

According to **Ven. Anagarika Dharmapala**[7], the Blessed One wished that the language used to convey the message of Buddha should be the language of the people, and not Sanskrit.

**Sanskrit** was and still is the language **exclusively** of Brahmins. In fact even in recent times before India became independent in 1947, high-caste Hindu teachers **would not teach Sanskrit** to children of low-caste Hindus and Untouchables in school! (Note: This happened to **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, the Greatest Champion of the Untouchables of India, while in high school because the Sanskrit teacher refused to teach Sanskrit to untouchables.)

Knowing well that the majority of the population in his time could not understand Sanskrit, the Buddha decided to use Magadhi as the medium of instruction in order to benefit the common people. So important is this point that the Buddha even made it an **offence** (*dukkata*) for monks to put his words in Sanskrit!

### b) *Saka Nirutti* – Our Own Language

Lately, Indian scholar **Dr. Mauli Chand Prasad**[8] has come up with a more sensible reappraisal of the controversy. According to him, Magadhi was the most popular dialect or vernacular used for local communication during the Buddha's time in the same sense as Hindi is adopted in present day India as the '*nij bhasa*' (lit. own language). He translates the term '*saka nirutti*' to mean '**our own language**' and the Buddha's injunction as "I allow, O monks, the words of the Buddha to be learnt in (our) own language", **meaning Magadhi**. This interpretation is in consonance with Ven. Buddhaghosa's interpretation and at the same time vindicates the Buddha's stand in disapproving the proposals of the monks Yamelu and Tekula to put the words of the Buddha into Sanskrit verses. Thus the terms '*saka nirutti*' and '*nij bhasa*' convey the same sense. Despite a long lapse of time between their uses, both of them denote the dialect or vernacular adopted for local communication of their respective ages.

## 3. What is Pali?

According to **Childers**[9], Magadhi was one of the **Prakrits** or Aryan vernaculars of ancient India. It was spoken in the sixth century BC in Magadha, the region around modern Bihar, which was one of the most important centres of Indian civilization in the Buddha's time. Magadhi has been a dead language for about two thousand years. The word ***'pali'*** in Sanskrit means 'line, row or series' and the Theravada extended its use to mean a series of books that form the text of the Buddhist Scriptures. So the **Pali Text** is synonymous with the Scriptures of the Theravada tradition. ***Palibhasa*** therefore means the 'language of the texts', which of course is equivalent to saying '**Magadhi language**'. The term '*pali*' in the sense of the sacred texts is ancient enough, but the term '***Palibhasa***' as the language of the Scriptures is of modern introduction by the Singhalese from which the English word is derived. 'Magadhi' is the only name used in the old Theravada texts for the sacred language of Buddhism.

As a language, Pali is unique in the sense that it is **reserved entirely to one subject**, namely, the Buddha's Teachings. This has probably led some scholars to even speculate that it was a kind of ***lingua franca*** created by Buddhist monks, for how else can one explain this paradox? On the contrary, it may very well mean that the ancient Elders (*Theras*) had truly memorized the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* in the **original dialect** of the Buddha, which is now a dead language! Theravada monks are reputed to be the most orthodox so it is **highly improbable** that they would change the original language of the Buddha's teaching unlike the other sects who switched to Sanskrit or mixed Sanskrit, something **forbidden** by the Buddha! This second explanation is more logical given the **religious zeal**, **dedication** and **legendary memory skills** of the ancient monks in preserving and perpetuating the Teachings of the Buddha by oral tradition.

As a spoken dialect, Pali does not have its own script and in each of the countries in which it is the sacred language of the inhabitants, namely: Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand, it is written in the script of that country. In modern times, the Roman alphabets are widely used, so it is usual to print Pali texts in Roman letters, which are

clear, simple and easily computerized, leading to the widespread learning and dissemination of the Pali Texts.

### a) The Origin and Home of Pali

There are many theories hatched by scholars regarding the original home of Pali. Early Pali scholars were of the opinion that literary Pali is the **vernacular Magadhi** used by the Buddha to preach the *Dhamma*. Later scholars based their opinion on philological grounds that Pali bears some resemblances to Paisaci, which they claimed is a western dialect while Magadhi is an eastern dialect. So Pali cannot be the Magadhi dialect spoken by the Buddha. But the **Magadhi** that scholars know of today is the language of the **Asoka Edicts** carved on rocks and pillars that were drafted by his scribes at the time when the majority of the populace could hardly read or write, as recent studies by **Salomon**[19] suggest that there was no written language during the Buddha's time. On the other hand, the dialect spoken by the Buddha was the **vernacular Magadhi** (**Note 1**) understood by the common people, by which the monks transmitted his Teaching and later became known as the Pali language of the Scriptures. An exhaustive review by the Indian scholar **Law**[5] concluded that it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion about the original home of Pali. According to **Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi**[10] current scholarly opinion holds that Pali was probably created as a kind of *lingua franca* for use by Buddhist monks in Northern India two hundred years after *Parinibbana* and may not be identical with the one used by the Buddha! Evidently these are scholars' conjectures and new theories are often proposed as **academic exercises**, many of which lack proper understanding of the **traditions and practices** of the *Sangha.*

### b) Role of the Buddhist Councils in Maintaining the Language

Concerning the language of the Pali Canon, most Western scholars appeared to have ignored the role of the Buddhist Councils in ascertaining the medium of transmission of the Buddha's teaching. As the authority of the Scriptures rests on its **ratification by the**

**Buddhist Councils**, so the language employed by the Councils plays the prime role in the transmission of the Scriptures. All schools of Buddhism agree that the three Buddhist Councils are historical facts, so the pertinent question that one should asked is: "What dialect would the *Arahants* from the East or West, employ to rehearse the Buddha's teachings in the First, Second and Third Councils?

For the First Council, there is no doubt it was the **Magadhi dialect,** as all council members were conversant with that dialect having learnt from the Master himself. During the Second Council, monks from both the Eastern and Western regions got together to rehearse the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* at Vesali. All the eight senior monks selected to settle the Ten Points were disciples of Ven. Ananda and Ven. Anuraddha. The most senior monk, **Ven. Sabbakami** who adjudged the issue, lived during the Buddha's time. Having learnt the teachings from the two Great Disciples of the Buddha, they would have used the same dialect to rehearse the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* in the Second Council.

All the theories linking Pali with Ujjaini or Paisaci or even a new language created by the monks as a kind of *lingua franca* after the Second Council appeared to have ignored two important facts. Firstly the Theravadin monks (*Sthavarivada*) who convened the Buddhist Councils are reputed to be the **most orthodox** (so-called '**no changers'**) of all the schools in the observance of the monastic rules and would certainly have retained the *Vinaya* in its original form and language for their fortnightly *Uposatha* ceremony. Secondly, **Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa**, who convened the Third Council in Pataliputta would still maintain the original dialect in the tradition of his lineage of *Vinaya* teachers (*Acaryaparampara*). So when the ***Arahant*** **Mahinda** and other members of the *Sangha* were sent to propagate the religion in Sri Lanka, they would have transmitted the Teachings in the language of the Third Council in order to **maintain the lineage** and avoid any misinterpretation.

In the light of these facts, it is **improbable** and **irrational** that the ancient Elders would want to change the language of the Buddha's words let alone invent some new language that will lead to misinterpretation of the Blessed One's unique teachings.

# 4. The First Council

According to *Cullavagga Kh.* XI of the **Book of Discipline**[4], the Ven. Maha Kassapa, on seeing an unhealthy trend among some monks immediately upon the *Parinibbana* of the Buddha, decided to convene a Council to compile the ***Dhamma & Vinaya*** (Doctrine & Discipline) to prevent the true doctrine from being submerged by false doctrines. This historic event took place at Rajagaha (Rajgir) three months after the Buddha's ***Parinibbana***. Five hundred leading *Arahants* attended the **First Council**, which lasted over seven months outside the **Sattapanni** caves on top of Vebhara hill in **Rajagaha**. **Ven Maha Kassapa** presided over the meeting. **Ven. Upali** was chosen to rehearse the ***Vinaya Pitaka*** or Basket of Discipline. He began each account with the words '***Tena Samayena***' — 'the occasion was this'.

Although **Ven. Ananda** was not an *Arahant* before the convocation, he was chosen to rehearse the ***Sutta Pitaka*** or Basket of Discourses because of his moral purity and his knowledge of the Scriptures which he heard directly from the Buddha's own mouth when he was the Buddha's personal attendant. As he was expected to play a leading part in the assembly composed only of *Arahants*, Ven. Ananda made strenuous effort and attained *Arahantship* in an inclined position with feet off the ground as he lay down to rest after a whole night's practice of meditation on the eve of the First Council. The Book of Discipline states that he was the only disciple to attain *Arahantship* free from the postures of sitting, standing, walking or lying down. At the First Council, Ven. Ananda prefaced each discourse with an account of where and to whom it was spoken, beginning with the words '***Evam me sutam***' — 'thus have I heard'.

### a) Was the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* recited in the First Council?

On the 3rd Basket of the *Tipitaka*, there is disagreement. According to **Warder**[2], Theravada and Mahasanghika versions did not mention the recitation of *Abhidhamma* but Sarvastavadin and Dhammagupta

sects said that Ananda recited the *Abhidhamma*. Other accounts mentioned that the ***Matikas*** or *Abhidhamma* Outlines were recited. There is no doubt about the recitation of the *Matikas* as the Pali Scriptures mentioned that the Buddha preached the *Abhidhamma* to his mother in heaven and taught them to Ven. **Sariputta** when he returned to earth daily for his meals. It is very likely that the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* as we know today consisted simply of some set of *Matika* headings, propounded by the Buddha himself when giving systematic instructions to his followers, and that this was later fully elaborated into *Abhidhamma* expositions. Since the agreement between the two oldest schools, Theravada and Mahasanghika, should establish the oldest available textual tradition, it would appear that only **two *Pitakas* were recited at the First Council** with the *Matikas* recited as part of the *Suttas* by Ven. Ananda.

With regard to doubts about the authenticity of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, one fact often overlooked is that the *Sutta Pitaka* too contains a considerable amount of pure *Abhidhamma*. This comprises all those numerous *suttas* and passages where ultimate (*paramattha*) terms are used, expressing the non-self (*anatta*) or functional way of thinking, for example, when dealing with the *khandhas, dhatus, ayatanas*, etc.

Concerning Ven. Sariputta's mastery and exposition of the *Dhamma*, the Buddha described it in *Nidana Samyutta* XII, 32. "The Essence of the *Dhamma* (*Dhammadhatu*) has been so well penetrated by Sariputta, O monks, that if I were to question him therein for one day in different words and phrases, Sariputta would reply likewise for one day in various words and phrases. And if I were to question him for one night, one day and a night, or for two days and nights, even up to seven days and nights, Sariputta would expound the matter for the same period of time in various words and phrases."

The **Expositor**[11] (*Atthasalini*) says: "Thus the giving of the method (*naya*) to the Chief Disciple who was endowed with analytical knowledge, was as though the Buddha stood on the edge of the shore and pointed out the ocean with his open hand. To the elder, the doctrine taught by the Blessed One in hundreds and thousands of methods became very clear."

Thereafter Ven. Sariputta repeated this doctrine to 500 select pupils, who memorized it. According to the Expositor, the textual order of the *Abhidhamma* originated with Ven. Sariputta who also laid down the numerical series in order to make it easy to learn, study, and teach the *Dhamma*.

It was then conveyed by oral tradition up till the time of the Third Council by the Elders: **Sariputta**, Bhaddaji, Sobhita, Piyapala, Piyadassi, Kosiyaputta, Siggava, Sandeha, **Moggaliputta Tissa**, Visudatta, Dhammiya, Dasaka, Sonaka, Revata and others. The reason why so many teachers were involved was because the *Abhidhamma* is a very profound teaching and required various teachers to memorize the various books. After that, it was conveyed by a succession of their pupils. Thus in India, it has been conveyed by an unbroken line of teachers. When Buddhism came to Sri Lanka, the Elders **Mahinda, Iddhiya, Uttiya**, **Bhaddanama** and **Sambala** brought it from India and from then on the *Abhidhamma* was conveyed in succession up till the Fourth Council when it was documented on palm leaves.

### b) Charges against Venerable Ananda

After the recitation of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, the monks made five charges against Ven. Ananda. He explained the circumstances behind each incident and said that he did not see any fault on his part but acknowledged them as wrongdoing out of faith in the *Sangha.*

i) He did not ask the Buddha which of the lesser and minor precepts the monks could abolish after the Buddha was gone because he had not thought of asking through forgetfulness. As the Council was unable to agree as to what constituted the minor rules, Ven. Maha Kassapa finally ruled that no disciplinary rule laid by the Buddha should be changed, and no new ones should be introduced. No intrinsic reason was given. Ven. Maha Kassapa did say one thing, however: “If we changed the rules, people will say that Ven. Gotama's disciples changed the rules even before the fire from his funeral pyre has ceased burning.”

ii) He had stepped on the Buddha's robe while sewing but it was not out of disrespect and he did not see any fault in it.

iii) He had allowed the body of the Buddha to be saluted by women first whose weeping had smeared the body with tears because he did not want to detain them for too long.

iv) He did not plead to the Buddha to live out His lifespan because his (Ananda's) mind was under the influence of Mara.

v) He pleaded for the admission of women into the Order out of compassion for Mahapajapati Gotami who had nursed the Buddha in His infancy when His own mother died.

**c) Imposition of Higher Penalty on Ven. Channa**

The next item concerned the imposition of the higher penalty amounting to complete ostracism, which the Buddha had pronounced on **Ven. Channa** before His *Mahaparinibbana*. This monk was the charioteer of the Master when He was a prince and was very arrogant, having slighted every member of the Order. Ven. Ananda travelled to **Ghositarama** in **Kosambi** to inform Ven. Channa, who fainted and fell when he heard the decision of the *Sangha* to ostracize him. Thereafter, he was so seized with grief and repentance that he remained alone and became earnest, zealous and resolute in his practice until he eventually won *Arahantship*. With Ven. Channa's attainment of *Arahantship*, the punishment achieved the desired result that the Buddha wanted for him and it automatically lapsed.

**d) Ven. Purana and the Eight Indulgences on Food**

After the monks had completed the Rehearsal of the Doctrine and Discipline, **Ven. Purana** who was wandering in the Southern Hills (*Dakkhinagiri*) during the meeting, arrived at Rajagaha with a large

company of monks. When asked by the Elders whether he supported the Rehearsal and would learn the text so rehearsed by them, Ven. Purana replied that the Doctrine and Discipline were well rehearsed by the Elders but he, however, would only remember them as he had heard personally from the Buddha. According to some Chinese translations quoted by **Teitaro Suzuki**[12], Ven. Purana expressed his satisfaction with the general proceedings of the Council, except as to the insertion of the following **eight indulgences**, which he remembered had been approved by Buddha. The eight things were: (1) keeping food indoors; (2) cooking indoors; (3) cooking of one's own accord; (4) taking food of one's own accord; (5) receiving food when rising early in the morning; (6) carrying food home according to the wish of a giver; (7) having miscellaneous fruits; (8) eating things grown in a pond.

He pointed out that these indulgences were not against the rule that forbids the taking of remnant of food. Ven. Maha Kassapa explained that he was correct in saying so, but that Buddha permitted them only on account of a scarcity of food, when the *bhikkhus* could not get a sufficient supply of it in their alms-rounds, and that therefore when this circumstance was removed, Buddha again bade them to abstain from these eight indulgences. Ven. Purana, however, protested, declaring that Buddha, who was all-wise, would not permit what was otherwise forbidden, nor would he forbid what otherwise was permitted. To this Ven. Maha Kassapa replied: "The very reason of his being all-wise has enabled him to permit what otherwise was forbidden, and to forbid what otherwise was permitted. Ven. Purana, we will now make this decision: That whatever Buddha did not forbid shall not be forbidden, and whatever Buddha forbade shall not be disregarded. Let us train ourselves in accordance with the disciplinary rules established by Buddha."

There is no mention that Ven. Purana raised any further objection after Ven. Maha Kassapa's explanation. When the Mahisasaka seceded from Theravada, they incorporated these eight indulgences in their *Vinaya* and this incident of Ven. Purana has been misconstrued by certain scholars, as the seed of dissension to explain the reason for the secession.

**e) Achievements of First Council**

The first council called the Council of Rajagaha was held three months after the *Parinibbana* under the sponsorship of King Ajatasattu of Magadha during the eighth year of his reign. The proceedings achieved four results, namely:

i) Compilation of the *Vinaya Pitaka* by Ven. Upali.
ii) Compilation of the *Sutta Pitaka* by Ven. Ananda.
iii) Acknowledgement of Wrongdoing by Ven. Ananda.
iv) Imposition of Higher Penalty on Ven. Channa.

After the compilation of the Doctrine and Discipline for oral transmission, the senior monks or Elders would have devised a system whereby certain monks in the same locality would be charged with the duty to memorize certain portions of the Doctrine and Disciple in Magadhi and by combining all the portions memorized, the *Sangha* in that locality would be able to recite the whole Doctrine and Discipline together. This is confirmed by the Gopaka Moggallana *Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikaya* in which the Venerable Ananda attributed the harmony of the *Sangha* to the fact that monks in each village observed the practice of assembling every fortnight to recite the *Patimokkha*.

# 5. The Second Council

About a century after the *Parinibbana*, some shameless monks of the Vajjian clan at Vesali were indulging in the **Ten Points** or *Dasa Vatthuni* that were against the *Vinaya* or Rules of Discipline. **Venerable Yasa**, son of the Brahmin Kakandaka and *Vinaya* expert from Kosambi, who was staying in Kutagara Hall at the Mahavana saw them asking for money from the laity and objected to it. Still the laity gave money to the monks who divided the takings at the end of the day among themselves and gave Ven Yasa his due share. When he refused to accept the money and reprimanded them, they passed a motion of censure (*Patisaraniya kamma*) against him whereby he had to apologize to the laity for forbidding them to perform *dana* (charity) to the Vajjian monks. Ven. Yasa, fully conversant with the law, demanded another monk to accompany him as witness to the reconciliation with the laity of Vesali, during which he defended his own view before the laity and won them over. When the accompanying monk reported the matter to the Vajjian monks, they charged Ven Yasa with proclaiming a false doctrine to laymen and pronounced an Act of Suspension (*Ukkhepaniya kamma*), effectively expelling him from the *Sangha.*

### a) Ten Points (*Dasa Vatthuni*) of the Vajjian Monks

The Ten Points or Indulgences that Ven. Yasa openly declared as unlawful were:

i) ***Singilona kappa***: The custom of putting salt in a horn vessel, in order to season unsalted foods when received. (Against *Pacittiya* 38 which prohibits the storing of food unless used as medicine)

ii) ***Dvangula kappa***: The custom of taking the midday meal, even after the prescribed time, as long as the sun's shadow had not pass the meridian by more than two-fingers' breadth. (Against *Pacittiya* 37 which prohibits eating after noon and before dawn)

iii) ***Gamantara kappa***: The custom of going into the village after the meal and there eating again, if invited. (Contrary to *Pacittiya* 35 which prohibits over-eating)

iv) ***Avasa kappa***: The custom of holding the *Uposatha* ceremony separately by monks dwelling in the same parish (*sima*). (Contravenes *Mahavagga* II, 8, 3: rules of residence in a parish)
v) ***Anumati kappa***: The carrying out of official acts by an incomplete chapter on the supposition that the consent of absent *bhikkhus* was obtained afterwards. (Unlawful according to *Mahavagga* IX, 3, 5)
vi) ***Acinna kappa***: It was permissible for a monk to do anything adopted as a practice by his preceptor. (Contrary to the rules)
vii) ***Amathita kappa***: The practice of drinking milk-curds even after the mealtime. (Against *Pacittiya* 35 which prohibits over-eating)
viii) ***Jalogi kappa***: The practice of drinking palm-juice, which is fermenting but is not yet toddy. (Against *Pacittiya* 51 which prohibits the drinking of intoxicants)
ix) ***Adasakam nisidanam***: The practice of using mats to sit on which were not of the prescribed size, if they were without fringe. (Contrary to *Pacittiya* 89 prohibiting the use of a fringed sitting cloth exceeding the prescribed size)
x) ***Jatarupam rajatam***: The practice of accepting gold and silver. (Prohibited in *Nissaggiya* 18, an offence involving forfeiture of the object relating to the offence)

After the Act of Suspension (*Ukkhepaniya kamma*) was pronounced, Ven Yasa went to Kosambi and sent messengers to the *bhikkhus* of the Western country, of Avanti and of the Southern country to enlist their support to stop the deterioration of the religion and ensure the preservation of the *Vinaya*. Next he went to the Ahoganga hill in the Upper Ganges to consult Ven. **Sambhuta Sanavasi** of Mathura and team up with sixty *bhikkhus* from the Western country (Pava) and eighty-eight from Avanti and the Southern country. Ven. Sambhuta Sanavasi advised them to consult Ven. **Revata** of Soreyya (Kanauj), a leading monk recognized for his piety and learning. Accompanied by him, they traveled to Soreyya to meet Ven. Revata. But he was aware of their mission and was on the way to Vesali to meet them. Both parties finally met at Sahajati where Ven. Yasa asked for his opinion regarding the Ten Points. Each one of them was declared to be unlawful by Ven. Revata.

**b) Ten Points Declared Unlawful by Second Council**

Meanwhile the Vajjian monks were following the developments of Ven. Yasa and they too went to Sahajati to enlist the support of Ven. Revata hoping to win him over with presents but he refused to accept them. So they induced his disciple, Uttara, to take up their cause but that too failed. When the *Sangha* met together to decide on the matter, Ven Revata suggested that it should be settled at the place where the dispute originated. So the elders went to Vesali where the *Sangha* assembled to settle the dispute but no progress was made due to much talk and fruitless discussion. So it was decided to settle the matter by referring it to a body of referees. Ven. Revata chose four *bhikkhus* of the East and four of the West. The referees of the East were the Venerable **Sabbakami**, **Salha**, **Khujjasobhita** and **Vasabhagamika**. Those of the West were the Venerable **Revata, Sambhuta Sanavasi**, **Yasa** and **Sumana**. Of the eight, six were pupils of Ven. Ananda (who lived to 120 years) while Ven. Vasabhagamika and Sumana were pupils of Ven. Anuruddha (said to have lived to 150 years). When the referees convened, Ven. Sabbakami, the most senior *Arahant* with 120 *vassas* (rains retreat) questioned by Ven. Revata, adjudged the Ten Points as unlawful according to the *Vinaya*. The same hearing was re-enacted before the full assembly and the verdict unanimously upheld.

According to **Mahavamsa**[13]**, a**fter settling this issue, Ven. Revata, chose seven hundred *Arahants* in order to hold a council to prevent the deterioration of the religion. The Council spent eight months rehearsing the *Dhamma & Vinaya* to ensure that the true doctrine was preserved and handed down to future generations. The Second Council is also called ***Yasatthera Sangiti*** (Elder Yasa's Rehearsal) because of the major role played by the Elder Yasa in his zeal to safeguard the *Vinaya.* It was held at **Valukarama** in **Vesali** a century after the *Parinibbana* during the reign of King Kalasoka.

# 6. The Great Schism

According to **Mahavamsa**[13], the Vajjian monks did not accept the verdict but held an assembly of their own attended by ten thousand calling it a ***Mahasangiti*** (great convocation) from which the sect derived its name **Mahasanghika.** From then on, further schisms led to the formation of different sub-sects, and in the course of time, 12 sub-sects arose from Theravada while 6 issued from Mahasanghika.

### a) Five Theories of Mahadeva

According to the Sanskrit *Pratimoksa Sutra of Mahasamghikas* discovered by Rahula Sankrtyayana in Tibet in 1934 and translated into English by **Charles S. Prebish**[14], all its *Vinaya* rules, except the 75 *sekhiyas* rules of training for novices (67 in Mahasanghika) are exactly the same as the Theravadin *Vinaya*. This means that the schism did not result from the differences in *Vinaya* or Disciplinary Code. According to the Sammitiya School, the first schism took place a few decades after the Second Council. The founder of Mahasanghika was Bhadra also known as **Mahadeva**, who came out with five theories concerning the *Arahant*. According to information collected by Watters (see **Dutt**[15], page 28), Mahadeva was the son of a Brahmin merchant of Mathura who was ordained at Kukkutarama in Pataliputra. By his zeal and abilities, he soon became head of the establishment, with the ruling king as his friend and patron. With the king's help, he was able to oust the senior orthodox monks and put forward his five theories, namely:

i) *Arahants* are subject to **lust** when having an erotic dream. (*Atthi arahato rago ti*).
ii) *Arahants* may have residue of **ignorance**. (*Atthi arahato aññānanti*)
iii) *Arahants* may have still have **doubts**. (*Atthi arahato kankha ti*)
iv) *Arahants* may be excelled because they may **need other's help**. (*Atthi arahato paravitarana ti*)
v) Attainment of the Path is accompanied by an **exclamat**ion (as 'aho').

**Rebuttal (Refer to *Kathavatthu*, Book II**[16]**)**

- Theravada completely rejected the first theory as the *Arahant* has **eradicated craving** and **ignorance** in his mental continuum. So lust cannot arise even while asleep.

- The second, third and fourth theories of Mahadeva maintained that (1) because an *Arahant* has no knowledge of such things of others as the name, family, etc., he is liable to be ignorant. (2) He is liable to get perplexed about facts concerning everyday life. (3) He is liable to be surpassed in such knowledge by others because it comes to him, is explained and disclosed by others. Theravada rejected them because those things mentioned are conventional truths having no bearing on the *Arahant's* knowledge and attainment since the *Arahant* is **absolutely free** from delusive **Ignorance** and skeptical **Doubt**.

- On the fifth theory, Theravada maintained that speech was not involved in the attainment of Path Consciousness.

- Obviously the Theravada elders would not accept these heretical views. With the help of the king, Mahadeva convened a great assembly (*Mahasangiti*) reportedly consisting of *Arahants* and non-*Arahants* that ratified his ideas and broke off from the original *Sangha* effectively creating the first schism. The idea that *Arahants* attended the *Mahasangiti* appears far-fetched since true ***Arahants*** would certainly have disagreed with these heretical propositions.

**b) Primary Cause of Schism**

Some scholars (see **Dutt**[15]) have theorized that the Vaisalians wanted a certain amount of latitude and freedom in the interpretation and observance of the rules and to introduce into their organization and general governance a democratic spirit, which was gradually disappearing from the *Sangha*. The exclusive power and privileges,

which the *Arahants* had claimed were looked upon with distrust and disfavour by the Vaisalians, who preferred a democratic rule to a monarchial government. The claim of the *Arahants* to become the exclusive members of the important Councils and to arrive at decisions, which were binding on non *Arahants* could not appeal to the Vajjians – a clan imbued with a democratic spirit.

The reasons given by scholars obviously represent the grievances of the Vaisalian monks from the secular point of view. When examined in the context of the *Vinaya* which governs the monastic order, they appear spurious and without merit, as discussed below:

- As far as the constitution of the *Sangha* is concerned, the conduct of a *bhikkhu* is governed by the *Vinaya* rules drawn up by the Buddha himself. After his *Parinibbana*, no locus of authority competent to be a source of law could exist in the *Sangha* because the Buddha did not appoint anyone to succeed him. Instead He directed the monks to regard the Teaching and Discipline as their teacher after He was gone. Thus each member of the *Sangha* stood on an equal footing in relation to the rest. The elders could advise and instruct but not direct or compel; each member was a refuge unto himself, having the Teaching as his refuge. When a dispute arises over the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, any decision should be arrived at through consensus by referring to the **Four Great Authorities** (**Note 2**). So the question of a democratic or a monarchial system of government does not arise.

- Secondly, *Arahants* by virtue of the eradication of greed, hatred and delusion have no interest in power or privileges. It is a well-known fact that within the *Sangha*, respect is accorded based on seniority not on attainment. In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha had stressed that for the growth of the *bhikkhus* "*they should show respect, honour, esteem and veneration towards the elder bhikkhus, those of long standing, long gone forth, the fathers and leaders of the Sangha, and deem it worthwhile to listen to them*".

- It appears that the Second Council followed this injunction by appointing the most senior *bhikkhus* present as referees to adjudge the Ten Points.

- As for the cause of the Schism, it is unlikely to be due to differences in the interpretation of v*inaya* (disciplinary rules). **Frauwallner**[17], who made a study of the similarities and divergences of the *vinaya* of six schools, namely: Theravada, Mahasanghika, Mula-sarvastivada, Mahisasaka, Dharmagupta and Sarvastivada, concluded: "*We can see at once that the agreement of the texts reaches deep into the particulars*."

- Hence there is no doubt that the theories proposed by Mahadeva were primarily responsible for the Schism. As these five theories were based on **worldly knowledge** and concepts, meant to create disrespect towards the *Arahants*, they were certainly unacceptable to the orthodox monks and this led to the Great Schism.

**c) Transformation of the Buddha and his Doctrine by Mahayana**

In the *Tipitaka*, the Buddha is not distinguished from any other *Arahant* except his extraordinary genius to be able to discover the Truths unaided, while others realized the Truths by his guidance. Theravada has remained closer to this conception though they later elevated His status to complete **'Omniscience'.** The Mahasanghika, having 'downgraded' the attainment of the *Arahant* found it desirable to make a clear distinction in the case of the Buddha.

According to the ***Kathavatthu***[15], the Mahasanghikas held the view that a Buddha exists everywhere in all directions of the firmament. Its offshoot, the Andhakas, even considered that a Buddha's daily habits notably speech, was supra-mundane. Out of indiscriminate affection for the Buddha, some even held that the excreta of the Exalted One excelled all other odorous things! Yet in spite of their

divergent views on the nature of the Buddha, the schismatic schools or ***Nikayas***, all aspired to the same goal — *Arahantship* as the ideal.

According to **Warder**[2], the Mahayana movement started with the appearance of *Sutras* of **anonymous** and **doubtful origin**, around the beginning of the Christian era in Andhra Pradesh in South India. The *Saddharma-pundarika* or '**Lotus of the Good Law**' claimed that after attaining Enlightenment, the Buddha decided to preach his doctrines in a modified form for the mediocre searchers of Truth to enable them to achieve their desired end. This modified teaching consists of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and Dependent Origination, subjects of the First Sermon. The Mahayana took this to mean that only an Omniscient One could realize the highest Truth while his disciples or *Savakas*, who could only attain perfection by observing the instructions of the discourse, realized only the absence of individual soul (***anatta***) and not the non-existence or **Emptiness** (***dhamma-sunnata***). According to **Rhys Davids**[18], "*Arahatship* is **explicitly condemned** and *Bodhisatship* held up as the goal at which every good Buddhist has to aim; and the whole exposition of this theory, so subversive of the original Buddhism, is actually placed in the mouth of Gotama himself."

Thus began the **transformation** of the Buddha and His *Dhamma* by Mahayanist logic and ratiocination that led step by step to Mahayana; from the humanism and **realization** of the Four Noble Truths and *Nibbana* of the original Teachings to the supernaturalism and **fantasy** of the Mahayana sutras and **Emptiness** doctrine in which long metaphysical and philosophical treatises in **Sanskrit** are created by scholars like Nagarjuna and Asvaghosa, which are **hardly intelligible** to the common masses, and are meant only for Sanskrit knowing scholars. Being well aware that the laity could hardly understand their abstract theories, the Mahayanist teachers created a new **Mahayana Pantheon** in order attract the masses to their 'Great Vehicle'. According to **Ven**. **Bhikkhu Kashyap**[1], "after a time, in the Mahayana tradition, the philosophical speculations were symbolized by various *Bodhisattas* and gods such as **Avalokitesvara** (*Bodhisatta* of Great Compassion), **Tara** (Goddess of Mercy), **Manjusri** (*Bodhisatta* of Meditation), and **Amitabha** (Buddha of *Sukhavati* or Western Paradise)."

## 7. Origin of the Eighteen *Nikayas* (Schools)

The **Eighteen** ***Nikayas*** or Schools of Buddhism arose sometime between one hundred to two hundred years after *Parinibbana* i.e., sometime between the Second and Third Buddhist Councils. They were called "***Hinayana***" (Mean or Inferior Vehicle), a contemptuous term tantamount to verbal abuse coined by followers of Mahayana who wanted to exalt their own doctrines and belittle the earlier forms of Buddhism. It should be pointed out that the Buddha had never preached any "superior or inferior vehicle" to his disciples, only the Noble Eightfold Path to end suffering. Due to its **derogatory nature**, the term '*Hinayana*' should be avoided when referring to the ***Nikayas*** or Early Schools of Buddhism.

According to the **Mahavamsa**[13], after the Second Council, (1) **Mahasanghika** seceded from the original *Sangha* and produced two schools (2) Gokulika and (3) Ekavyoharika. From Gokulika, arose (4) Pannatti and (5) Bahulika or Bahussutiya and from these the (6) Cetiya sect making with the Mahasanghika a total of six. From the (7) **Theravada**, two more groups seceded, namely (8) Mahimsasaka and (9) Vajjiputtaka. The latter produced (10) Dhammuttariya, (11) Bhaddayanika, (12) Channagarika and (13) Sammitiya while the former produced (14) Sabbathivada and (15) Dhammaguttika. From Sabbathivada, (16) Kassapiya split off and later produced (17) Samkantika and from this (18) Suttavada. (**Note 3**)

According to **Rhys Davids**[18], evidence from the Mahavastu, the main text of the **Lokuttaravadins** (an offshoot of the Mahasanghika furthest removed from Theravada) shows very little of its teaching that could not have been developed from Theravada. The difference was the prominence given to legendary matters and in the consequent inattention to ethical points. In fact, all the early schools looked upon *Arahantship* not *Bodhisattaship*, as the ideal of a good Buddhist. However their concept of the *Arahant* and other doctrinal matters differed from the Theravada giving rise to the composition of the ***Kathavatthu***[16] by Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, President of the Third Council. The reader should refer to the *Kathavatthu* for the full refutation of the heretical views held by the various schools.

In most of the cases, the difference between one school and another may be ascribed to geographical factors rather than to doctrinal differences. The first serious differences before the Schism found the Buddhists tending to separate into a western group around the great triangle of **Kosambi–Mathura–Ujjaini** and an eastern group at **Vesali**. In the case of Theravada, events of the Second Council showed that the monks of the west, especially of **Kosambi** and **Avanti** dominated this group. The first group to secede, namely, the Mahasanghikas remained in and around **Pataliputta** as their main centre while Theravada dominated at **Avanti** and spread rapidly into Maharashtra, Andhra and down to the Chola country as well as **Ceylon**. Soon after the Second Council, **Mathura** became the first centre of the **Sabbathivadins** and from there their influence radiated all over Northern India, particularly in **Kashmir** and **Gandhara**. The **Kassapiyas** in fact were a group of Theravada cut off from the mainstream Theravada by the seceded Sabbathivadins and for a long time they maintained contact with their original base at **Sanchi** near Bhopal. More widespread were the **Sammitiyas**, who spread across Avanti and Gujarat to form their main centre at **Sindhu** while the **Lokuttaravadins** branched out as far away as **Bactria**.

The majority of the Eighteen *Nikayas* were short-lived but some grew in strength and survived for several centuries, notably: **Theravada**, **Sabbathivadin, Mahasanghika, Sammitiya** and **Lokottaravadins**. Hsuan Tsang who visited India in AD 629-645 estimated the Buddhist *bhikkhus* in India and the adjacent countries to the Northwest at less than two hundred thousand, ¾ of whom belonged to the above five *Nikayas* and the remaining ¼ belonged to Mahayana. Eventually the Mahayana expanded northwards and eastwards to Central Asia and China, eclipsing the *Nikayas*. Of the remaining *Nikayas*, Theravada established itself in Sri Lanka and Burma and has survived to this day after Buddhism disappeared from India following the Muslim conquest in the 12th century AD.

# 8. The Third Council

The Third Council was held **236 years** after *Parinibbana* during the reign of **Emperor Asoka.** The Mauryan king who ruled India from Kashmir to the Ganges valley and south almost to Madras had become a Buddhist and was doing everything within his power to aid Buddhism. This royal patronage attracted thousands of heretics to don the yellow robe for worldly gain. Although they dwelt with the *bhikkhus* yet they continued to preach their false doctrines and caused confusion in the religion. By reason of their great numbers and unruliness, the *bhikkhus* could not restrain them by the *Vinaya* rules so that no *Uposatha*-ceremony (fortnightly recitation of the *Patimokkha*) or *Pavarana* (invitation) was held for 7 years.

When Asoka sent his minister to investigate and settle the matter, the foolish official killed several monks. Hearing of the misdeed, Asoka was filled with remorse and doubts lingered in his mind whether he was responsible for the crime. He was told that the ***Arahant* Moggaliputta Tissa,** who was living in solitary retreat on the Ahoganga Mountain further up the Ganges, could resolve his doubt. Asoka had to invite the *Arahant* three times before the latter came to Pataliputra. There he was received with great honour by the king who accommodated him in Asokarama and for seven days, the king received instructions at the feet of the *Arahant*. The *bhikkhus* were then tested on their views and the heretics were expelled from the *Sangha*. The pure *bhikkhus* who remained performed the *Uposatha*-ceremony after a lapse of seven years.

### a) Compiling the Final Recension of the *Tipitaka*

The *Arahant* Moggaliputta Tissa took the opportunity to hold the **Third Council** in order to compile the true doctrine. One thousand *Arahants* took part in the Council held at **Asokarama** in **Pataliputra** (modern Patna) in the $18^{th}$ year of Asoka's reign, **236 years** after the *Parinibbana*. Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa presided over the meeting in which controversial doctrines of various Buddhist

sects were examined and refuted leading to the composition of the ***Kathavathu*** (Points of Controversy), one of the seven books of the ***Abhidhamma.*** The assembly took nine months to rehearse the Teaching after which the Pali *Tipitaka* was compiled and closed.

### b) Propagation of the Religion outside India

With the Buddhist king Asoka being the supreme ruler of nearly all of India as the chief patron, the time was now ripe for expansion. Accordingly, Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa, the recognized leader of Theravada, decided to send competent *Arahants* to propagate the Buddha's Teaching all over India and beyond. Each team was headed by an Elder and consisted of five monks, the quorum required to confer higher ordination in remote regions. The names of the Elders and the nine places where they were deputed are given in the **Mahavamsa**[13]. Archeology has confirmed the **historicity** of these missions. In *Stupa* No. 2 at Sanchi near Bhopal, were found two relic caskets from the 2nd or 1st century BC, inscribed with the names of some of the missionaries. In this way the Buddha's Teachings spread in the four directions after the Third Council.

| | MISSIONARIES | PLACE |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Majjhantika Thera | Kasmira & Gandhara[1] |
| 2. | Mahadeva Thera | Mahimsamandala[2] |
| 3. | Rakkhita Thera | Vanavasi[3] |
| 4. | Yonaka Dhammarakkhita Thera | Aparantaka[4] |
| 5. | Maha Dhammarakkhita Thera | Maharattha[5] |
| 6. | Maha Rakkhita Thera | Yonaka[6] |
| 7. | Majjhima Thera | Himavantapadesa[7] |
| 8. | Sonaka and Uttara Theras | Suvannabhumi[8] |
| 9. | Mahinda, Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasala Theras | Tambapannidipa[9] |

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[1]**Gandhara** comprises the districts of Peshawar & Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Kasmira is modern Kashmir.

[2]**Mahimsamandala** is generally taken as modern Mysore.

[3]**Vanavasi** was composed of coastal regions such as Kerala and Malabar.

[4]**Aparantaka** or the 'western ends' comprise the Mumbai (Bombay) region, northern Gujarat, Kachchh and Sind.
[5]**Mararattha** is modern Maharashtra.
[6]**Yonaka** (Sanskrit Yavana) together with the Kambojas means clans of foreign race in the northwest frontier included in Asoka's empire.
[7]**Himavantapadesa** is the Himalayan country.
[8]**Suvannabhumi** or 'golden land' is Bago (Pegu) and Mawlamyine (Moulmein) district in Mon state of Myanmar (Burma).
[9]**Tambapannidipa** is the island of Sri Lanka.

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## c) Achievements of the Third Council

The Third Council **refuted and eliminated** all the tendencies which were no longer regarded as consistent with the faith and brought the Pali Canon to a close. However, its **greatest achievement** was the sending of missionaries to other countries to propagate the faith because prior to this, Buddhism was basically a local religion confined mainly to a few states of Northern India. Thanks to the wisdom and foresight of Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa, the royal patronage of Emperor Asoka and the teams of highly dedicated missionaries, the Buddha *Sasana* has spread beyond the borders of its narrower home. Thus when Buddhism disappeared from India for six hundred years after the Muslim conquest during the 12$^{th}$ century AD, the light of the *Dhamma* still shone in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other Theravada countries where the *Sasana* had been founded. Today we are witnessing a new phenomenon whereby monks from other Buddhist countries are returning to India to revive the Buddha *Sasana* in its country of origin!

Strangely enough, a story in the **Mahavamsa** written during the 6$^{th}$ century AD (**Note 4**) tells us that Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was a Brahma-god called Tissa in his previous existence. At the time of the Second Council, the *Arahants*, foreseeing danger to the religion in the future, approached him for help as his lifespan in the Brahma realm was coming to an end. He consented to be born in the world of men in order to prevent the downfall of the Buddha's religion. Subsequent events appear to confirm the **prophecy** of the *Arahants* of the Second Council.

# 9. Committing the *Tipitaka* to Memory

The *Tipitaka*, which contains all the Teachings of the Buddha during his 45-years ministry, is about 11 times the size of the Bible. Its sheer volume has led some scholars to think that the First Council was pure fiction and that the huge mass of the *Vinaya* and *Sutta Pitaka* recited was impossible. It is just beyond the comprehension of the skeptical scholar that someone like Ven. Ananda could be able to remember so much! However monks with such prodigious memory are found in the *Sangha*. During the Sixth Buddhist Council held in Yangon in 1956, the late Venerable **Mingun Sayadaw Ashin Vicittasarabhivamsa** had committed the whole *Tipitaka* to memory and was able to answer all questions related to it when questioned by the chief questioner of the Synod, the late Venerable **Mahasi Sayadaw Ashin Sobhana**. Today, Myanmar has produced several living *Tipitakadharas*, or persons who have committed the whole *Tipitaka* to memory! (**Note 5**)

Recent studies by **Salomon**[19] suggest that there was no written language during the Buddha's time. The early Indian Brahmi and Karosthi scripts appeared to originate from the Mauryan era based on the testimony of **Megasthenes** to the absence of writing in the early Mauryan period and the persistent failure to find and identify actual specimens of pre-Asokan writing. However, such evidence is by no means conclusive. Although the art of writing was employed later to give instructions, it did not become popular, the emphasis of education being on the development of memory and the retentive power. Therefore, the **oral tradition** continued to be the established custom to transmit the Teaching. Monks were still required to memorize the Teaching even after the written language appeared, just as it is still practised today by Theravada monks in Burma.

Although the majority of the sects started to use Sanskrit or mixed-Sanskrit as the language of transmission, the **orthodox Theravada** kept strictly to Pali. Thus, Theravada monks became very adept in reciting the Pali texts, aided by their highly developed memory skills so well attested in ancient and modern India. With different groups of monks specializing in their respective sections of the *Tipitaka*, it

would not be difficult for them to recite the whole *Tipitaka* by **combining their expertise**. The Pali literature is replete with terms describing the areas of specialization of monks with respect to the *Tipitaka*, such as:

i) *Suttantika* or master of the *Sutta Pitaka*
ii) *Vinaya-dhara* or one versed in the *Vinaya* or Discipline
iii) *Matika-dhara* or one versed in *matika* or *Abhidhamma*
iv) *Digha-bhanaka* and *Majjhima-bhanaka* (Reciters of the *Digha* and *Majjhima Nikayas*)

This demonstrates that the ancient *theras* (monks) had developed a system whereby they could collectively preserve the entire *Tipitaka* intact from memory. Some of them were *Arahants*, and so by definition, '**pure ones**' free from lust, ill-will or aversion, and delusion. With such purity of mind, they were without doubt, capable of retaining perfectly the Buddha's words in their minds. Thus they ensured that the Buddha's teachings would be preserved faithfully for posterity.

## 10. Fourth Council: Committing the *Tipitaka* to Writing

Situated off the main road about 40 km from Kandy in Sri Lanka is a village called **Matale**. Although lesser known to ordinary tourists, it is well-known to Buddhist scholars because here one can find the **International Buddhist Library & Museum** and the historic **Aloka Cave**, site of the **Fourth Council**, where the Buddha's Teachings were committed from oral transmission into writing on ola palm leaves. Visitors to the Museum will be able to view the process in which ola leaves are dried, smoothened and observe the technique of writing with ink on the leaves. There is a showcase, where a set of the Pali *Tipitaka* written on ola leaves is kept.

According to the **History of the Religion**[20] (*Sasanavamsa*), at one time a famine arose in the island of Sinhala (Ceylon) and many monks left the island as they feared they would not be able to learn the three *Pitakas* due to lack of food. However, 60 monks stayed behind by the seashore and studied together living on roots, fruits and the like. Being oppressed by hunger and weakness, they lay down on the sandy ground while keeping their heads facing each other and without uttering a word they studied the scriptures in their minds. Thus did they preserve the three *Pitakas* together with the commentary for twelve years, and help the Religion forward. At the end of twelve years, 700 monks returned from India and studied the Teachings together with the 60 monks who had stayed behind. At that time they agreed with each other and did not differ. This was how the great Elders or *Mahatheras* (monks of twenty years standing or more) accomplished the difficult task of remembering precisely the three *Pitakas* orally in this way.

The zeal and dedication of the ancient *theras* in the learning of the canonical texts without missing a single word is illustrated by the following story. After he had learnt the Buddha's words from the **Elder Dhammarakkhita** of Yona country in India, the **Elder Tissa**, son of a landlord Punabbasu, took leave to return to Ceylon. While traveling to the port to board a ship to sail home, he had some doubts regarding a certain verse in the *Tipitaka*. So he retraced the journey

back to his teacher, a distance of 100 *yojanas* (1 *yojana* = 8 to 12 miles) in order to remove his doubt before his teacher. In this way, it should be understood how very difficult a task it was to bear in mind, the canonical texts without missing a single word. And whatever they could not learn by heart, they preserved by way of study, remembrance and the like, in order that it might neither disappear nor be confused. In this way, for a long time since the First Council, the succession of great Elders handed down the canonical texts even orally.

### a) Documentation of the *Tipitaka* on Palm Leaves

According to records compiled by Ven. **Nanamoli** [21], four months after **Vattagamini Abhaya** became king of Lanka (104-88BC) his reign was interrupted by the rebellion of the Brahman Tissa, followed by famine, invasion by the Tamils and the king's exile. The *bhikkhus* from the **Mahavihara** or Great Monastery all dispersed to the south and to India. After fourteen years, the king returned and defeated the Tamils. With the restoration of the king, the *bhikkhus* returned to Sri Lanka. Filled with religious zeal, Vattagamini built the **Abhayagiri** *vihara* and offered it to the ***thera*** **Mahatissa** who had assisted him in his bid to regain his kingdom. Later on, the monks of the Abhayagiri seceded from the Mahavihara and became schismatic. Sensing insecurity, the Mahavihara took the precaution to commit the *Tipitaka* for the first time to writing, doing it in the provinces away from the king's presence.

About four hundred and fifty years after the *Parinibbana*, during the reign of King Vattagamini in **89 BC** (*see footnote), 500 great Elders held a Council presided by **Ven. Rakkhita Mahathera** and thinking, "In future, beings of poor mindfulness, wisdom and concentration, will not be able to bear in mind (the canonical texts) orally", decided that the three *Pitakas* together with the commentary should be written in books. It was a time when the *viharas* were deserted and oral transmission of the texts was difficult. The art of writing had, by this time developed substantially, so it was thought expedient and necessary to have the entire body of the Buddha's

teaching written down to prevent confusion or disappearance of the True Religion.

The historic event took place at the **Aloka cave** *Vihara* or ***Aluvihara*** in the Malaya country (Matale), a place in the island of Tambapanni (Ceylon). This council is considered to be the **Fourth** by the Theravada school although in India, another council held under the patronage of the **Kushan king Kanishka (Note 6)** around 100 AD is considered as the Fourth Council.

At the end of this Council, the texts along with the *Attha-kathas* (commentaries) were inscribed on ola palm leaves and the scriptures were thoroughly checked and rechecked to ensure their authenticity. This was how the three *Pitakas* were preserved. A visit to Aloka Cave will certainly evoke a deep sense of gratitude to the *Sangha* for their wisdom and compassion in authenticating and documenting the Buddha's teachings for future generations. Thanks to the foresight and indefatigable efforts of these great Elders, there is no room either now or in the future for self-styled 'progressive monks or scholars' to adulterate the pure Teaching.

*(The dates are calculated according to the Theravada tradition, which places the Buddha's *Parinibbana* in 543BC. Western sources place the Buddha's *Parinibbana* in 483BC, 60 years later.)

# 11. Fifth and Sixth Councils in Myanmar[22]

According to the **Mahavamsa**[13], at the end of the Third Council, missionary monks were sent to various countries neighbouring India by the Council President Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa to propagate the Buddha's Teaching. Two monks, **Ven. Sona** and **Ven. Uttara** were sent to Suvannabhumi, which is Bago and Mawlamyine (Moulmein) district in **Mon state of Myanmar**, with the objective of founding the Buddha *Sasana* there. They converted the Myanmar people in that region to the religion by preaching the *Brahmajala Sutta.* Thereafter the Buddha *Sasana* was firmly established in Myanmar for over two thousand years. Hence it is not surprising that Myanmar has taken the leading role in preserving, propagating and perpetuating the Buddha's Teaching in modern times by holding two Buddhist councils during the last two centuries.

**a) The Fifth Council** (*Panca Sangiti*)

According to the Theravada tradition, the Fifth Council took place in Mandalay, Myanmar in 1871AD during the reign of King Mindon. The chief objective of this Synod was to recite all the teachings of the Buddha and examine them in minute detail for errors, alterations and omissions. Three Great Elders, **Ven. Mahathera Jagarabhivamsa, Ven. Narindabhidhaja,** and **Ven. Mahathera Sumangalasami** led this council attended by 2,400 monks. Their joint *Dhamma* recitation (*Dhamma Sangiti*) lasted five months.

At the end of the Fifth Council, the entire *Tipitaka* was inscribed on 729 marble slabs in the Myanmar script for posterity. Each marble slab measured 1.68m high, 1.07m wide and about 0.13m thick and this monumental task was executed by many skillful craftsmen. Upon completion, each slab was housed in a beautiful miniature pagoda on a special site in the grounds of King Mindon's Kuthodaw Pagoda at the foot of Mandalay Hill. According to the Guinness Book of Records, these 729 slabs represent the largest book in the world today.

**b) The Sixth Council** (*Chattha Sangiti*)

The Sixth Council was held from **1954 to 1956** under the auspices of the Burmese Government led by the then Prime Minister, U Nu. It was held at **Kaba Aye, Yangon** in the Maha Passana Guha, a huge assembly hall resembling the great cave at Sattapanni in Rajagaha, venue of the First Council. Like the preceding councils, the objective was to authenticate and preserve the genuine *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. A total of 2473 monks from Myanmar and 144 monks from seven other countries, namely, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam took part in the Rehearsal.

Preliminary preparations lasted three years from 1951-1954 whereby the *Tipitaka* and its allied literature in all scripts were painstakingly examined with their differences noted, the necessary corrections made, and collated. It was found that there was not much difference in the content of any of the texts. Then having agreed upon the final version, approved unanimously by all the parties concerned, the full Assembly met on the **full-moon day of May 1954**. All the 40 books of authenticated, accepted version of the Pali *Pitaka* were chanted by 2600 *bhikkhu*s in five sessions spread out over two years from 1954 to 1956. The late **Mahasi Sayadaw Bhadanta Sobhana** acted as ***Pucchaka*** (Questioner) while the late **Mingun Sayadaw Bhadanta Vicittasarabhivamsa** acted as ***Vissajjhaka*** (Answerer) answering correctly all questions related to the *Tipitaka* from memory. Finally, after the Council had officially approved the texts, all of the books of the *Tipitaka* and their Commentaries were prepared for printing. This notable achievement was made possible through the dedicated efforts of the 2,600 monks and numerous lay people. Their noble task came to completion on the full-moon day of May 1956, to coincide with the **2,500$^{th}$ Anniversary** of the Lord Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana*. The version of the *Tipitaka* of this Council known as the **Sixth Synod Edition** has been recognized as the pristine teachings of the Buddha. It is the **most authoritative** rendering today. After the scriptures had been examined thoroughly several times, they were put into print, covering 52 treatises in 40 volumes, or 8026 pages in total. At the end of this Council, all the participating countries had the *Pali Tipitaka* rendered into their native scripts, with the exception of India.

# Conclusion

The Buddhist Councils were crucial in ensuring that the true doctrines of the Buddha were preserved for future generations. Each council authenticated the Pali *Tipitaka* by rehearsing them in an assembly comprising hundreds of learned monks and *Arahants*, whereby false doctrines were purged and points of controversy settled. The Pali Canon or *Tipitaka* is generally considered to be the **oldest body** of Scriptures documenting the Buddha's teachings, somewhat older than its Sanskrit counterpart, though some Sanskrit scholars resist this opinion. According to **Childers**[9], the Pali version of the Buddhist Scriptures is the **only genuine** and **original** one.

When the Buddha made the injunction that monks were to learn his teaching in '*saka nirutti*' (own language) meaning **Magadhi**, the **common dialect** of the region in his time, it was in consonance with the ancient method of learning by oral tradition whereby pupils were required to learn the master's doctrine in the language that the latter preached by. In an oral tradition, mistakes and distortions are bound to arise frequently. By adopting a **common medium of instruction**, these mistakes and distortions can be quickly detected and corrected by rehearsing together. This was what actually took place in the Buddhist Councils after the Buddha's *Parinibbana* to ensure that the true teachings were preserved.

There is much controversy among scholars regarding the origin of Pali, the language of Theravada Scriptures. However to Theravada Buddhists, it is a non-issue. As pointed out by Sayadaw U Thittila[1], the Pali Canon contains everything necessary to show forth the Path to the ultimate goal of *Nibbana*, the cessation of all suffering. This can only mean one thing, namely, that the **Buddha's true teachings** have been preserved in its pristine form in the Pali Canon. For this we are indebted to the **religious zeal**, **dedication** and **prodigious memory** of the ancient monks (*Theras*) in preserving, propagating and perpetuating the Teachings of the Buddha, from his *Mahaparinibbana* till the present day.

# Appendix

## Contents of the *Tipitaka* or Three Baskets

**a) *Vinaya Pitaka* or Basket of Discipline**

Made up of rules of discipline laid down by the Buddha for regulating the conduct of disciples who have been ordained into the Order as *bhikkhus* (monks) and *bhikkhunis* (nuns)

Consists of 5 books, namely:

1) Major Offences (*Parajika*) ─ including explanation of how each rule was promulgated and listing special cases and exceptions.
2) Minor Offences (*Pacittiya*) ─ including explanations and exceptions.
3) Great Section (*Mahavagga*) ─ giving rules for admission into the *Sangha*, ordination, dress-code, residence, and rules for performance of special monastic activities.
4) Smaller Section (*Cullavagga*) ─ dealing with the treatment, offences, and duties of teachers and novices, with special rules for nuns.
5) Epitome of the *Vinaya Pitaka* (*Parivara*) ─ containing commentary primarily on the Great Section and stories about the events following the Buddha's Enlightenment.

**b) *Sutta Pitaka* or Basket of Discourses**

Contains the discourses delivered by the Buddha on various occasions as well as some discourse delivered by his disciples. It is divided into 5 Collections or *Nikayas.*

1) Collection of Long Discourses (*Digha Nikaya*) ─ 34 discourses divided into 3 sections dealing with training of the disciple.
2) Collection of Medium-Length Discourses (*Majjhima Nikaya*) ─ 152 discourses, many of which tell of the Buddha's austerities, Enlightenment and early teachings.
3) Collection of Connected Discourses (*Samyutta Nikaya*) ─ these are divided according to subject matter into 5 divisions

4) Collection of Discourses from Gradual Sayings (*Anguttara Nikaya*) ─ 9557 short discourses in 11 divisions, beginning with discourses on 1 subject in first division, 2 subjects in second division and moving up to discourses containing 11 subjects in the last division. The name *Anguttara* means 'increasing by one item'.
5) Collection of Short Discourses (*Khuddaka Nikaya*) ─ This is the biggest volume, made up of 15 books which contains the most exquisite parts of the entire canon:
    i) Shorter Texts (*Khuddaka Patha*)
    ii) The Way of Truth (*Dhammapada*)
    iii) Solemn Utterances (*Udana*)
    iv) Thus it was said (*Iti-vuttaka*)
    v) Collected Discourses (*Sutta Nipata*)
    vi) Stories of Celestial Mansions (*Vimana Vatthu*)
    vii) Stories of Departed Spirits (*Peta Vatthu*)
    viii) Psalms of the Brethen (*Theragatha*)
    ix) Psalms of the Sisters (*Therigatha*)
    x) Birth Stories (*Jataka*)
    xi) Expositions (*Niddesa*)
    xii) Analytical Knowledge (*Patisambhida*)
    xiii) Lives of Arahants (*Apadana*)
    xiv) Chronicle of Buddhas (*Buddhavamsa*)
    xv) Basket of Conduct (*Cariya Pitaka*)

**c) *Abhidhamma Pitaka* or Basket of Ultimate Things**

The *Abhidhamma* was incorporated as the Third Basket during the Third Council held in the 3rd century BC. It deals with the higher philosophy of the Buddha and contains these seven books:

1) Enumeration of Phenomena (*Dhammasangani*)
2) Book of Analysis (*Vibhanga*)
3) Treatise on the Elements (*Dhatukatha*)
4) Book of Human Types (*Puggala Pannati*)
5) Points of Controversy (*Kathavatthu*)
6) Book of Pairs (*Yamaka*)
7) Conditional Relations (*Patthana*)

# Explanatory Notes

## Note 1: Pali and Magadhi

Many theories have been proposed by scholars regarding the original home of Pali. According to **Ven. Anagarika Dharmapala**[7], **Oldenburg** is of opinion that Pali had for its home the country south of the Vindhya Mountains. Another noted critic of Pali **Dr. Franke** is of the view that the home of Pali may be found between the middle and western Vindhya mountains. Yet another critic **Dr. Windisch** differs in his conclusions with Franke and Oldenburg and says that the Buddha used the language of Magadha. Many Pali scholars are of the opinion that literary Pali is the vernacular Magadhi used by the Buddha to preach the *Dhamma* and the use of the word Pali as the name of the language in which the Buddhist texts are composed is **purely figurative** and that its real name is Magadhi.

The Blessed One wished that the language used to convey the message of Buddha should be the language of the people, and not Sanskrit. **Magadhi, Suraseni, Paisaci, Maharashtri, Prakrit** were the dialects spoken by the people at the time, and the Blessed One beautified the vernacular by inventing expressions and terms to expound His wonderful Doctrine of the ***Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma***. Pali may be called the **middle language** which was used by the Blessed One to expound the Doctrine of the Middle Path. The ornate and embellished Sanskrit and the vulgar Paisaci Prakrit He avoided, and made a **classic of purified Magadhi**, which was called Pali to designate the language that He used as different from existing dialects. Pali is the language of the Buddha which could easily be understood by the natives of Magadha, Kosala, Suraseni, Kasi, and Gandhara.

**Sten Konow** has shown the resemblances that exist between Pali words and Paisaci. **Sir George Grierson,** at one time Collector of Gaya and an expert of Hindi dialects, agrees with **Windisch** that literary Pali is Magadhi. He gives a list of the places where the Paisaci dialects were spoken, namely: Kancidesiya, Pandya Pancala; Gauda, Magadha, Vracada, Dakshinatya, Saurasena, Kaikeya, Sabara, Dravida. Pandya, Kekaya, Bahlika, Simhala, Nepala, Kuntala, Sudhesna, Bota, Gandhara, Haiva and Kannojana.

Says Dr. Grierson: "The first thing that strikes one about these three lists is the great extent of country that they cover. If we are to accept them in their entirety, Paisaci Prakrit was spoken over nearly the **whole of India** and also in Tibet." Since the time of the Blessed One the **Pali language** began spreading not only in India, but beyond. Wherever the Buddhist *Bhikkhus*

went there arose centres of literary culture, and they transplanted Indian art, agriculture, gardening, floriculture, architecture, etc.

## Note 2: The Four Great Authorities (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*)

During the journey to his final resting place in Kusinara, the Buddha stayed at the Ananda shrine in **Bhoganagara** (present day Kesariya) and taught the four standards by which his disciples would be able to decide whether a certain teaching was actually his words or not. These standards, called the **Four Great Authorities** are:

(a) A *bhikkhu* may say: "I heard and learned it from the **Blessed One's own lips**; this is the Law, this is the Discipline, this is the Master's teaching".
(b) A *bhikkhu* may say: "In a certain dwelling place there is a community of elders and a chief; I heard and learned it from the **lips of that community**; this is the Law, this is the Discipline, this is the Master's teaching".
(c) A *bhikkhu* may say: "In a certain dwelling place many elder *bhikkhus* live who are learned, expert in the traditions, memorizers of the Discipline, memorizers of the Codes; I heard and learned it from **those elders' own lips**; this is the Law, this is the Discipline, this is the Master's teaching".
(d) A *bhikkhu* may say: "In a certain dwelling place an elder *bhikkhu* lives who is learned, expert in the traditions, memorizer of the Discipline, memorizer of the Codes; I heard and learned it from **that elder's own lips**; this is the Law, this is the Discipline, this is the Master's teaching".

In such a case, the declaration of this *bhikkhu* should be neither approved nor disapproved but **carefully studied word by word** and then verified in the ***Vinaya* Disci**pline or confirmed in the ***Sutta* Discourses**.

If they are found to be **not verified** in the *Vinaya* or confirmed in the *Suttas*, one can conclude that they are not the Blessed One's word, they are **wrongly learned** by that *bhikkhu* or that community or by those elders or by that elder. One should accordingly **reject** them.

If however, they are found to be **verified** in the *Vinaya* and confirmed in the *Suttas*, one can conclude that they are the Blessed One's word, they are **rightly learned** by that *bhikkhu* or that community or by those elders or by that elder. One should accordingly **accept** them.

## Note 3: Eighteen *Nikayas* (Ancient Schools of Buddhism)

### A) **Mahasanghika and Related Schools.**

**Mahasanghika** or School of the **Great Assembly** (attended by ten thousand heretical monks) is acknowledged as the first *Nikaya* to secede from the original *Sangha* after the Second Council. They had their main centre at Pataliputta but later on migrated from Magadha in two streams, one northwards and the other towards the south. The southern group settled down in Andhra Pradesh around Amaravati and Dhanakataka, their branches concentrating at Nagarjunikonda, dwelling on the mountains around. The Pali version has been fully borne out by the inscriptions discovered in these areas, namely, the Pubbaseliyas, Uttaraseliyas or Aparaseliyas, Siddhatthikas and Rajagirikas, collectively designated as **Andhakas** by Buddhaghosa in his commentary on the *Kathavatthu*. Of the northern Mahasanghikas, he mentioned the Ekabboharikas, Gokulikas, Pannattivadins and Bahusuttika. However except for the Gokulikas, their views have not been referred to in the *Kathavatthu*, indicating perhaps they ceased to retain any practical importance at all.

1) **Gokulika** (Kukkulika) — The doctrine of this school considered the world to be red-hot with misery and devoid of happiness, a *kukkula*, due to the misunderstanding of the Fire Sermon.

2) **Ekavyoharika** (Ekavyavaharika) — This school was hardly known in later times and was probably reabsorbed into the Mahasanghika.

3) **Bahulika** (Bahusrutiya) — This school emphasized religious knowledge and erudition (*bahusutta* = learning).

4) **Cetiyavada** (Chaitiyavada) — This school emphasized the *cetiya* or shrine worship. It is identified with the **Lokottaravadins** because the Mahavastu, which is an avowed text of the Lokottaravadins, gives prominence to the worship of *cetiyas*.

5) **Pannattivada** (Prajnaptivada) — the concept (= *pannatti*) school

6) **Purvasaila** and **Aparasaila** (= Uttarasaila) — refer to the schools of Andhra country whose followers were called the “East-Cliffmen” and “Opposite Cliffmen” respectively. Part of the **Andhaka** schools.

## B) **Theravada (Sthavira) and Related Schools**

**Theravada** means the doctrine of the Elders and was the original *Sangha* from which the other schools seceded. Its texts are written in Pali, recognized as the vernacular language used by the Buddha.

1) **Mahisasaka** — named after Mahisaka country where this school was formed. Like Theravada, the Mahisasaka adhere to the view that an *Arahant* is beyond the reach of any seduction and cannot relapse.

2) **Vajjiputaka** (Vatsiputriya) — probably formed by Vajjian monks who did not join the Mahasanghika but branched out independently later. They prepared a new recension of the *Abhidhamma* based on the belief of the existence of a personality or *puggala*, a belief shared by the Sammitiyas. Both schools were also called **Puggalavadins.**

3) **Dhammuttarika** (Dharmottariya**)** — Higher *Dhamma* school an offshoot of the Vajjiputtakas and were found in Aparanta on the coast of Maharastra at the port of Soparaka and places nearby.

4) **Bhaddayanika** (Bhadrayanika) — the "Auspicious" vehicle, an offshoot of Vajjiputtaka. To the Bhaddayanikas is attributed the doctrine of "*anupubbabhisamaya*" – that realization of the Four Noble Truths is acquired in segmentary order

5) **Channagarika** (Sannagarika) — School of six towns, an offshoot of Vajjiputtaka. To them is attributed the doctrine of *Dukkhaharoti,* the utterance of the word "*dukkha*" leads to knowledge (*nana*).

6) **Sammitiya** (Sammatiya) — from "***samma ditthi***" means the school of Right View. It ascribes its origin to Mahakaccana but Mahavamsa puts it as an offshoot of Vajjiputtaka. The only remarkable doctrine of the Sammitiyas is that regarding the nature of the *puggala*, which served as the carrier of the five kandhas or aggregates through births and rebirths of beings. Like the Sabbathivadins they also held that there is an *antarabhava* i.e. an intermediate state between the death of a being and its rebirth.

7) **Sabbathivada** (Sarvastivadin) — derived from "***sabba athi***" or "everything exists" and refers to the doctrine of this school. They held almost the same views about the human life and the universe as the Theravadins, in the non-existence of soul, in impermanence and the law of *Kamma*. However the Sabbathivadins believed in the reality of the five aggregates (*khandhas*) that compose a being as against the

Theravadin's view of their unreality. Thus they admitted the reality of *khandhas* as existing in all times – past, present and future.

8) **Dhammagutika** (Dharmagupta) — started in Gujarat and Sindhu and named after the Greek missionary Dhammarakkhita or Dharmagupta who was sent there after the Third Council. This explains why it was not mentioned in the *Kathavatthu*.

9) **Kassapiya** (Kasyapiya) — named after the founder Kassapagotta, who with Majjhima propagated Buddhism in the Himalayan region. It is identical with the **Haimavata** school.

10) **Samkantika** (Sautrantika) — This school denied the authority of *Abhidhamma* and admitted only that of the *suttas*. Hence they were closer to the **Suttavadins** who followed the doctrine of the *suttas.*

## Note 4: Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa

According to **Mahavamsa**, the **Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa**, President of the Third Council, was a Brahma-god called Tissa in his previous existence. At the time of the Second Council, the *Arahants*, foreseeing danger to the religion in the future, approached him for help as his lifespan in the Brahma realm was coming to an end. He consented to be born in the world of men in order to prevent the downfall of the Buddha's religion and subsequently took rebirth as the son of the *brahmin* **Moggali** of Pataliputta. The Elders **Siggava** and **Candavajji**, both disciples of **Sonaka** (himself a disciple of **Dasaka**, who received ordination from **Ven. Upali**) had been entrusted with the task of converting him. From the time of Tissa's birth, therefore, for seven years, Siggava went daily to the house of Moggali, but not even one word of welcome like "Go further on", did he receive. In the eighth year someone said to him, "Go further on." As he went out he met Moggali, and on being asked whether he had received anything at his house, he said he had. Moggali inquired at home and the next day charged Siggava with lying. But hearing Siggava's explanation, he was greatly pleased and thereafter constantly offered Siggava hospitality at his house. One day, young **Tissa**, who was thoroughly proficient in the Vedas, was much annoyed at finding Siggava occupying his seat and spoke to him harshly. But Siggava started to talk to him and asked him a question from the **Citta Yamaka**. Tissa could not answer it and in order to learn the Buddha's teachings, he entered the Order under Siggava, becoming a *Sotapanna* or Stream-winner soon after. Siggava instructed him in the

*Vinaya* and Candavajji in the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma Pitakas*. In due course he attained *Arahantship* together with the supernormal powers and became the acknowledged leader of the monks at Pataliputta.

At the festival of dedication of the Asokarama and the other monasteries built by **King Asoka**, Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, in answer to a question by Asoka, said that even a lavish donor of gifts like him was not a kinsman of the Buddha but one becomes a kinsman of the Buddha's religion only by letting one's son or daughter enter the Order. Acting on this suggestion, Asoka had two of his children, **Mahinda** and **Sanghamitta** ordained. Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa acted as Mahinda's preceptor. Later, because of the great gains which accrued to the monks through Asoka's patronage of the Buddha's religion, the Order became corrupted as heretics donned the yellow robe for material gain and dwelt together with *the bhikkhus*. Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa committed the monks to the charge of Mahinda, and for seven years lived in solitary retreat in the **Ahoganga Mountain.**

Due to the great number of heretics and their unruliness, no *Uposatha* ceremony was held for seven years in all the monasteries. When Asoka sent his minister to investigate and settle the matter, the foolish official killed several monks. Hearing of the misdeed, Asoka was filled with remorse and doubts lingered in his mind whether he was responsible for the crime. He was told that Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, who was living in solitary retreat on the Ahoganga Mountain further up the Ganges, could resolve his doubt. From there Asoka sent for him to solve his doubts as to what measure of sin belonged to him owing to the killing of the monks by his minister. But Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa would not come until Asoka appealed to him that his services were needed to befriend the religion. The Elder traveled by boat to Pataliputta, and was met at the landing place by the king who helped him out by supporting him on his arm.

The king then led him to **Rativaddhana Park** and to test the Elder’s faculty, begged him to perform a miracle, which the Elder consented to do and made the earth quake in a single region. To convince the king that the killing of the monks involved no guilt on himself, the Elder preached to him the **Tittira Jataka**. Within a week, with the aid of two *yakkhas*, the king had all the monks gathered together and held an assembly at the Asokarama. In the presence of Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, Asoka questioned the monks on their various doctrines, and all those holding heretical views were expelled from the Order, Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa decreeing that the **Vibhajjavada** alone contained the teaching of the Buddha. Later, in association with 1,000 *Arahants*, Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa convened the Third Council at Asokarama, and compiled the **Kathavatthu** (**Points of**

**Controversy**), in refutation of false views. This was in the seventeenth year of Asoka's reign and Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa was seventy-two years old. At the conclusion of the Council in nine months, Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa made arrangements, in the month of Kattika, for monks to go to the countries adjacent to India for the propagation of the religion.

## Note 5: *Tipitakadharas* of Myanmar Today

- *Tipitakadhara* = Bearer of the *Tipitaka* ('recitation')
- *Tipitakakawida* = Bearer of the *Tipitaka* ('oral' and 'written')
- *Maha Tipitakakawida* = Passing the 'oral' and 'written' with distinction
- *Dhammabhandagarika* = Keeper of the *Dhamma* Treasure

The above Titles are awarded to successful Buddhist monks in Myanmar if the candidates can recite 8026 pages of the Buddhist Canon or *Tipitaka* and also pass the written examination, which includes the Commentaries and Sub-commentaries. *Tipitakadhara* Selection Examination is the most extensive, most difficult and highest. No one passed any of the categories in 1948 when it was first held in Rangoon (Yangon) after the country gained Independence. The aim of the examination was to promote the emergence of the outstanding personalities who can memorize and recite the whole of the *Tipitaka* (8026 pages or about 2.4 million words in Myanmar Pali).

It is the longest examination in the world and the entire examination is spread over five years. In the first and second year, the candidates are examined in *Vinaya Pitaka* (2260 Pages) lasting a total of 20 days (3 days each for 5 volumes plus 5 days for the written part covering the Commentaries and Sub-commentaries). In the third year the candidates are examined in 3 volumes of the *Sutta Pitaka* (779 pages). In the fourth and the fifth years, the examination on the first five (1390 pages) and the last two (3597 pages) of seven volumes of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is arranged. The total length of the examination used to be four years before.

The first successful candidate was Venerable U Vicittasarabhivamsa, who was later known as the 'Mingun Sayadaw'. He passed the *Vinaya* part in the 1950 Examination. In 1953 he completed the final part at that time of the *Pathika Vagga* of the *Sutta Pitaka* and became the first ever '*Tipitakadhara*' in Myanmar (Burma) at the age of 42 and his achievement was recorded in the Guinness Book of Records. Since then, more and more outstanding monks have been awarded full titles for their fabulous memory. Since 1948, the following candidates have earned the title of *Tipitakadhara*.

| Title Holders | Titles* | Year | Age (First Title) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ven. Vicittasarabhivamsa | 1,3,4 | 1953 | 42 |
| Ven. Nemainda | 1,2,4 | 1959 | 32 |
| Ven. Kosala | 1,2,4 | 1963 | 36 |
| Ven. Sumingalalankara | 1,2 | 1973 | 27 |
| Ven. Sirinandabhivamsa | 1,2 | 1984 | 42 |
| Ven. Vayameindabhivamsa | 1,2 | 1995 | 39 |
| Ven. Kondanna | 1 | 1997 | 55 |
| Ven. Silakhandabhivamsa | 1,2 | 1998, 2000 | 34 |
| Ven. Vamsapalalankara | 1,2 | 1998, 2000 | 32 |
| Ven. Indapala | 1 | 2001 | 40 |
| Ven. Sundara | 1 | 2001 | 45 |

*1 = *Tipitakadhara*, 2 = *Tipitakakawida*, 3 = *Maha Tipitakakawida,*
*4 = *Dhammabhandagarika*

One may question the wisdom of arranging this extremely difficult examination now that we can put the *Tipitaka* texts on CD-ROM and there is no question of the *Tipitaka* texts disappearing from this world. But the actual rewards of the whole examination is reflected in the emergence of thousands of monks who have memorized all or some of the texts by heart and are able to help lay worshippers with their instant sermons and discourses, faster than the CD-Rom texts appear on the computer screen. Mastery of the Pali Canon will ensure that the monks transmit their knowledge with authority. So the ultimate aim of the *Tipitaka* Examination is to promote propagation of the Buddhist Teaching, which is the noblest of all the gifts, the Gift of the *Dhamma* in its purest form.

**Reference:** *Tipitaka* Golden Jubilee 1948/49 – 1997/98 Magazine, Religious Affairs Directorate Press, Myanmar, 1998

## Note 6: King Kanishka of the Kushans

The **Kushans** belonged to the **Yueh-chih** tribe, who originally lived in the western frontier of China between Tun-huang and Chi-lien-shan. They were driven out of China by the Hsiung-nu (the powerful Asiatic Huns of North China) around 177BC and the greater part of the group migrated westward into present-day eastern Kyrgyzstan around Lake Issyk Kul, driving south the local nomadic **Sakas** or Scythians. Not long after this, the Yueh-chih faced another round of attack by the Hsiung-nu, forcing them to flee to **Sogdiana** (present day Uzbekistan, west of Ferghana) and **Bactria** (ancient

country lying between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus River in what is now Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), where they overran the local Sakas. They and related tribes are the Asiani and **Tokharians** of Western sources. In around 128BC, the Yueh-chih were recorded as living north of the **Oxus River** (Amu Darya) ruling over Bactria which they had divided into five divisions. A new dynasty, that of the Kushans was subsequently founded by one of the five chieftains named **Kujula Kadphises**, who united the other four divisions under his rule. Kujula Kadphises invaded **Parthia** (the country around Khorastan in Iran) and took **Kabul**. His son **V'ima Kadphises** succeeded him and inherited a large kingdom consisting of the Kushan homelands north of the Oxus and Kujula's conquest – Kabul, Kashmir, Gandhara and Taxila. V'ima increased these holdings with the subjugation of northern India as far as **Mathura**.

The most famous Kushan king was **Kanishka I** (ruled 78 – 102AD) whose capital was at Purusapura near modern **Peshawar**. Kanishka succeeded to a large empire and made it even larger by further conquest of India as far as Bihar in the east, Sindh and Baluchistan in the southwest. He was later converted to Buddhism and supported the **Sarvastivada**, one of the eighteen *Nikayas*, which dominated in Mathura and in the northwest. Daily he would invite monks to preach in his palace but found their views so contradictory that he became confused and consulted the Venerable **Parsva** about the true doctrine. At the latter's advice, Kanishka decided to convene a Council in which the various *Nikayas* were represented. The aim of the **Fourth Council** was to put an end to the dissensions in the *Sangha*. It was presided by **Vasumitra** and reportedly held in Jalandhar or Kashmir around 100AD. The Theravadins do not recognize this council and there is no mention of it in the Ceylonese Chronicles. According to the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang, after the treatises were composed, they were engraved on sheets of red copper and stored in stone boxes, which were deposited in a *stupa* built for the purpose. These texts have survived only in Chinese translations and adaptations.

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